

Woodley Lane Bridge Abutment
Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway
Washington
District of Columbia

HAER No. DC-24

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DC
WASH,
602-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

**HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
WOODLEY LANE BRIDGE ABUTMENT
HAER No. DC-24**

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Location: Woodley Lane Bridge Abutment stands in a heavily wooded area approximately 200' northeast of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge, and adjacent to the Park Police Training Stables' parking lot at Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Washington, D.C.

Date of Construction: 1888-89.

Designer and Builder: Groton Bridge & Manufacturing Company, Groton, New York.

Present Owner: National Park Service.

Present Use: A remnant of the bridge removed after 1905--before which it carried streetcar, vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Significance: Woodley Lane was the first bridge of significant size and durable material erected in the northern part of the Rock Creek Valley. The extant parts of the bridge, which connected Woodley Lane and Belmont Road, recall the early history of Washington's physical and population expansion.

Project Information: The documentation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was undertaken as a two-year pilot project to help establish standards and guidelines for recording the structures and landscape features of park roads and parkways. This project was a joint effort of the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a combined division of the National Park Service, Robert Kapsch, chief. The project was sponsored by the Park Roads Program of the National Park Service, John Gingles, deputy chief, Safety Services Division. The project supervisor was Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

The Washington-based summer 1992 documentation team was headed by landscape architect Robert Harvey (Iowa State University-Department of Landscape Architecture) who served as field supervisor; the landscape architects were Deborah Warshaw (University of Virginia) and Dorota Pape-Siliwonzuk (US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Palaces and Gardens Restoration); the architects were Evan Miller (University of Colorado-Boulder), Steven Nose (University of Maryland), and Tony Arcaro (Catholic University). The historians were Tim Davis (University of Texas) and Amy Ross (University of Virginia). Jack E. Boucher made the large-format photographs; Air Survey Corporation of Sterling, Virginia, produced the aerial photography and digital mapping from which the site-plan delineations were made.

History of the Crossing

On February 7, 1888, the committee on the District of Columbia, to whom a bill to authorize the construction of a bridge across Rock Creek at Woodley Lane Road had been referred, reported that such a bridge was necessary and should be constructed.¹ Several earlier bridges had stood at this site, but they were insubstantial and temporal. One, built of wood, washed away in 1875. Another similar bridge stood here at the time of the Civil War.² The 1888-89 structure, built in response to this committee's recommendation, was the first bridge of any importance in the northern part of Rock Creek Valley.³

Design and Description

Construction on the Woodley Lane Bridge started on September 15, 1888. The structure cost only \$35,000 as a result of \$15,000 saved through the use of three spans of iron originally intended for the Eastern Branch Bridge, also in Washington. It was built by Groton Bridge & Manufacturing Company of Groton, New York.

The bridge was 450' long x 32' wide, and stood approximately 54' above the creek. Four iron Pratt trusses of 112' each were supported by two masonry abutments and three iron trestles. Streetcars and vehicles occupied 24' of its width, and 4' sidewalks accommodated pedestrians.

The bridge connected Belmont Road with Woodley Lane. On both sides of the valley, the approach to the bridge was downhill.⁴ Congress reported in 1898 that the elevation at which Woodley Lane Bridge was located was justifiable only because limited funds prevented its being placed higher.⁵

The Bridge's Demise

When completed on July 18, 1889, Woodley Lane Bridge was a large structure compared to other crossings in the city.⁶ Yet, less than ten years later, it was considered inadequate. In 1898 when the Connecticut Avenue Bridge was first planned, it was suggested that the Woodley Lane Bridge be moved upstream into the National Zoological Park.⁷

A 1905 picture of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge during construction shows one of its large arches encircling the older bridge, indicating the relatively small size of this structure in contrast to the new one. Leaving the Woodley Lane Bridge in place during construction of the new bridge provided for little interruption of traffic.

On February 10, 1905, an appropriation was approved to fund the immediate removal of Woodley Lane Bridge. This was done by the District Construction Company. At the time,

¹ U.S. House, Bridge Across Rock Creek (50th Cong., 1st sess., 1888, H. Rpt. 326). (Serial Set 2599).

² Zack Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 53-56 (1959): 123.

³ John Clagett Proctor, "Rock Creek Bridges Tell Story of City's Growth," Sunday Star, Washington, D.C., 1 December 1935.

⁴ Fred A. Emery, "Washington's Historic Bridges," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 39 (1938): 64.

⁵ U.S. Senate, Viaduct Across Rock Creek, District of Columbia (55th Cong., 2nd sess., 1898, S. Doc. 96). (Serial Set 3593).

⁶ Proctor, n.p.

⁷ U.S. Senate.

District commissioners considered re-erecting the bridge at Q Street, but determined this would be too expensive. The old bridge was destroyed after the Connecticut Avenue Bridge was completed.⁸

The only remains of this bridge is a single 30' high x 30' wide portion of an abutment composed of large blocks of Seneca red sandstone faced with gray ashlar. Two small stone piers also remain, fragments of supports that once held up the bridge's trusses.

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⁸ Newspaper clipping in "Bridges," Vertical files at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library, Washingtoniana Division, Washington, D.C.